

some old feuds continue to the present in nonviolent ways (ridicule, adultery, land disputes, song taunts, gossip). Kuschel doesn't explain whether the concern with personal and group reputation, which motivated the disputes in former times, still exists at present. Moreover, I wasn't completely satisfied with Kuschel's argument that feuding did not result from competition over land use and resources. This conclusion would be more forceful if it included an analysis of disputes (or lack of them) over resources on Bellona since 1938. On the few occasions when Kuschel does provide brief discussions of present-day conflict, they are enlightening and help explain important factors affecting motivations and allegiances in traditional feuding.

Readers will be grateful for what there is. Perhaps a study of conflict and disputes since 1938 will be in a future volume of the Rennell and Bellona series. If so, I hope the authors will include texts. In any case, the present volume provides a rare and detailed analysis of the oral narratives that record feuding in a pre-Christian Polynesian society.

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Cultural Alternatives and a Feminist Anthropology: An Analysis of Culturally Constructed Gender Interests in Papua New Guinea, by Frederick Errington and Deborah Gewertz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. ISBN 0-521-33492-6, xi + 185 pp, illustrations, notes, references, index. £20.

In this study of the Chambri, a Sepik group of Papua New Guinea, Errington and Gewertz reconsider Margaret Mead's work on what she called sex roles, offering instead their analysis of gender interests. Gewertz is a Sepik specialist; Errington has worked in several other areas, including island Melanesia.

This book invokes a number of dualisms—in addition to contrasting theories of male-female relations, pairs of ethnographers, societies, and generations figure into its makeup. The mixture of the personal and the sociological, the concrete and the abstract, makes the book enjoyable reading, but sometimes raises issues that are not answered. It is not always clear whether a particular feature should be regarded as style or argument. The monograph's challenge to conventions is readily seen in the choice of illustrations, which in addition to photos of classic ethnographic subjects (e.g., "A woman, behaving as a child, stuffs raw sago down her throat," 109) includes views of Gewertz' daughter, cartoons, a sketch made by a Chambri child, and a cover that brings to mind the mood of Gauguin's South Seas paintings.

The book begins in an appealing way by posing a question raised by a fieldwork incident: Gewertz' irritated reaction when her male informant Yorundu announces his intention to show previously unrevealed ritual objects to Errington alone, thus treating her as a member of the category "female" rather than as a professional anthropologist. In effect, the book is an attempt to understand the differing cultural assumptions that collided in this incident. We learn in the final

chapter, when the authors return to interpret this incident, that Yorondu's act is seen as an attempt to dominate Gewertz by depriving her of her capacity to make decisions.

Although the book compares Chambri with the West (the chapter on gender interests in the West is not about any one society, but a combination of sociological generalizations, with occasional observations on individuals), the section on Chambri is by far the longest. It consists of two parts, subtitled cultural premises and social action. In both parts, the authors' approach centers on the intensive analysis of exemplary events. Materials such as myth, life history, accounts of inquests, ritual, formal affinal transactions, or love letters may be described and interpreted. Some of these may yield unexpected information (e.g., in chapter 1, an old man gives Gewertz a letter to deliver to his four sons in the capital, Port Moresby; the authors venture reasons why she is the appropriate messenger, not simply a convenient one).

The Chambri section establishes the support for the authors' assertions about Chambri gender interests, in contrast to Mead's views. Briefly, Mead argued that Chambri women were like Western men—economically responsible for their households, hearty, assured, and comradely—whereas Chambri men are like Western women, preoccupied with art and gossip, overly concerned with their hairdos. On this basis, Mead suggested that Chambri women were more powerful than Chambri men. Errington and Gewertz contend that Mead used alien Western psychological and economic standards to evaluate Chambri

culture. They argue that Chambri notions of what is important and of the self are so different from our own that such measures are useless.

In the present study, Chambri women do not dominate men, nor are they dominated by men, because neither stands in the way of the attempts of the other to achieve basic worth. For both sexes, this is repayment of ontological debt. In concrete terms, this means replacing one's self by having children (for women) and amassing totemic names—or at least preventing their dispersal as much as possible—for men).

The Chambri represented one case study in Mead's larger argument in her popular books on gender, which asserted a cultural rather than a biological basis for sex-role differences. The authors agree with Mead's overall intent to show the mutability of gender; we learn that the Chambri are different, although they are not comparable to us. However, to understand how they differ from us helps us to see our own Western assumptions more clearly.

The book under review takes the point of view of recent anthropological writing that seeks to interpret rather than to explain: the goal is to understand. Yet, ironically perhaps, I found the people described in this book to be mystifying as human beings. I had trouble grasping the place of a lofty ideal like "repayment of ontological debt" in their daily lives. Is this a philosophy, a source of motivation, a consolation? It seems to me that more proximate factors are needed to explicate life as it is lived. The result, it seems, of representing the Chambri in

this way is to discount most kinds of unpleasantness, for example, bargaining over brides, monetization of social relations, marriage away from sisters, because these do not affect a woman's ability to bear children. Does any detail of daily existence bother these imperturbable women?

One of the lessons of gender scholarship in anthropology has been to demonstrate the difficulty of comparing societies. The present work is yet another instance that upholds this finding. By discarding approaches that have made the greatest claims to universality in the study of behavior, namely economics and psychology, we are free to begin afresh. The book raises a question, then, which needs to be asked from time to time: what is it that we want to know about other women's lives and to what end? The authors talk about wishing to aid the women's movement in the West in creating greater equality between the sexes; they conclude that our knowledge of cultural alternatives is the major tool we have to make changes in our own society.

A final note: one of this book's most successful aspects is its deft incorporation of personal information (especially about Gewertz) into its arguments. It must be seen not only as a contribution to gender and Melanesian scholarship, but to the newer tests of monographic writing, regarding to what extent and how our personal lives can and should figure in our studies.

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New Caledonia: Anti-Colonialism in a Pacific Territory, by Helen Fraser. Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1988. ISBN 0-7315-0484-4, 88 pp, map, photographs, appendixes, notes, select bibliography. Paper, price not stated.

Helen Fraser reported for Australian newspapers from New Caledonia from 1982 to 1985 and now edits the newsletter, *Pacific Report*. Her slim volume chronicles events in New Caledonia from the early 1980s to the signing of the Matignon Accord between the pro- and anti-independence political factions and the French government in 1988. Most of her information comes from her own experiences in the French South Pacific territory, including conversations with various political figures. She charts the changing positions and strategies of the various political parties and the government in Paris, the episodes of violence that have periodically broken out in the territory, and the attitudes of the Australian government and several international organizations, such as the South Pacific Forum and the United Nations.

Fraser's narrative moves rapidly; the first hundred years of the French presence in New Caledonia are summarized in two pages. Little information is provided on the economy of the territory, and no background on the Melanesians or the settlers is given. Even some events of recent years, notably the hostage-taking and aftermath on Ouvéa island in 1988, are very briefly treated. Readers unfamiliar with the New Caledonian situation may find the cast of characters (and the